



Making a Successful Transition to Adult Life

"The comprehensive planning process has given stakeholders an important role in informing OSEP on how IDEA Part D national activities can help improve results for children with disabilities."

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Research to Practice

Experts Inform Part D National Program Plan

In 1999, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) launched a long-range, comprehensive planning process for Part D of the reauthorized 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*. OSEP's goal for its Part D national program is to link best practices to states, school systems, and families to improve results for infants, toddlers, and children with disabilities. Part D of IDEA '97 authorizes national program activities and federal funding (see figure, this page).

OSEP undertook a significant initiative in implementing the Part D national program comprehensive planning process. Among

the activities undertaken were:

- Solicit opinions about the Part D national program through mass distribution of an opinion survey.
- Convene experts to identify issues in key program areas and make recommendations for how the Part D national program may address them.
- Use recommendations from the opinion survey, panels, and other national and state sources to develop a five-year Part D national program plan.

This brief focuses on the opinions of national authorities regarding improving the results of secondary education, transition, and employment for students with disabilities.

Findings

Congress viewed the reauthorization of IDEA as an opportunity to better prepare children and youth with disabilities to make a successful transition to adult life. Promoting increased options and opportunities for students with disabilities requires that they participate in a rigorous and relevant curriculum that will provide them with the skills and competencies required by their postsecondary goals.

The authorities identified four issues to be addressed in improving the results of secondary education, transition, and employment for students with disabilities. They also suggested how Part D national program activities in part might address these issues through research and knowledge building, public awareness and support, and capacity building.

IDEA Part D National Program



Issue 1: Students with disabilities need training in self-determination and self-advocacy skills, as well as opportunities to use those skills in meaningful contexts.

Presently, many students with disabilities have limited opportunities to make significant choices as part of their secondary school experience, leaving them unprepared to communicate, problem solve, and self-advocate in postsecondary environments. Emphasis during the transition years on developing and applying decision-making, communication, and advocacy skills to promote self-determination must be viewed as critical components of each student's IEP/transition plan.

To this end, the authorities suggested that Part D national program activities might support research and knowledge production on self-determination practices and outcomes. In addition, capacity might be developed to implement and sustain long-term consistent student-family-school partnerships that address barriers to self-determination and self-advocacy.

Issue 2: Secondary-aged students with disabilities must be able to access, participate, and progress in a rigorous and relevant general education curriculum.

Many secondary students with disabilities are tracked into low level academic courses. Those who do participate in regular general education classes may find that teachers are unfamiliar with diversifying instruction or making the types of accommodations and modifications students with disabilities need to succeed in a rigorous curriculum.

Knowledge and application at all levels of secondary schooling is needed to ensure that the academic needs of students with disabilities are met. To this end, the authorities suggested that Part D national program activities might support public

awareness and build capacity for the utilization of effective practices, policies, and organizational structures that include students with disabilities in rigorous and relevant general education curricula.

Issue 3: Service coordination and collaboration must be enhanced.

While improving interagency collaboration has been an important focus for more than two decades, its benefits have yet to be realized by many individuals with disabilities, particularly after they lose the protections of IDEA (i.e., a free appropriate public education) when they exit school. Too often, education and workforce development systems remain separate.

The successful transition of students with disabilities from secondary schools to postsecondary settings requires coordination and collaboration across multiple agencies. To this end, the authorities suggested that Part D national program activities might support public awareness and build capacity for:

- Policies requiring interagency collaboration and planning (e.g., postsecondary education, workforce development).
- Effective strategies, models, and information that assists students, parents, and professionals in the transition decision-making process.

Issue 4: More accountability is needed for results and postsecondary outcomes.

There are a number of barriers to achieving post-school accountability for students with disabilities. Generally, there is little agreement regarding the value of school and post-school data as a guide to school reform and improvement. Accountability for students tends to end when students graduate or exit school. Post-school data is seldom collected, and when it is, there

is little sharing between the school and other agencies.

The collection, analysis, and use of post-school measures for students with disabilities are critical elements in expanding accountability from school graduation to indicators of post-school success. To this end, the authorities suggested that the Part D national program might support research and knowledge building to identify practical, efficient, sustainable strategies and materials for collecting and using student school and post-school achievement data for school improvement.

Next Steps

OSEP staff members are currently discussing the implications of expert opinions. Their results, along with those of the consumer survey and other relevant planning information—such as the findings of Parts B and C monitoring and oversight efforts and State Improvement Grant Program proposals, as required under Part D, Subpart 2 of IDEA—are being integrated by agency-wide staff workgroups into a comprehensive Part D national program plan. The public will be invited to comment on the Part D national program plan before it is presented to Congress for approval. ■

**The comprehensive planning process is authorized by IDEA [sec. 661(1)].*

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